



**Minority Leader
C. Allison Russo**

November 16, 2023

Representative Elliot Forhan
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

OFFICIAL ELECTRONIC MAIL SENT VIA EMAIL. NO HARD COPY TO FOLLOW

Representative Forhan,

Effective immediately, you are stripped of all committee assignments and you are hereby disallowed caucus staff services. Furthermore, you are instructed to refrain from contacting staff— interns, pages, legislative aides, and caucus staff.

Your continued pattern of harassment, hostility, and intimidation of colleagues and staff are unacceptable. You have been counselled multiple times, yet refuse to accept the responsibility and weight of your position, actions, and discourse. Because you are an elected official, the consequences above provide some recourse in meeting the tone, tenor, and substance of your behavior.

It is an honor to serve the People of Ohio at their Statehouse, but your history of increasingly hostile and inappropriate behavior combined with your failure to correct it has overshadowed any good the voters expected you to do on their behalf.

The Speaker of the House is being copied on this letter to take any further necessary and appropriate action on behalf of this institution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Allison Russo".

C. Allison Russo
Minority Leader
Ohio House District 7



MEMORANDUM

To: House Democratic Leadership
CC: House Democratic Chief of Staff, Legal Counsel, Personnel Officer
From: House Democratic Leader C. Allison Russo
Date: February 2023 – Current
Re: Elliot Forhan's History of Hostile & Inappropriate Behavior

In May 2023, while serving at the Statehouse, Forhan escalated a dispute with one of his constituents following a House committee hearing. The dispute stemmed from a disagreement over legislation Forhan supported. Forhan escalated the disagreement so aggressively that bystanders tried to intervene on behalf of the constituent. Forhan engaged in shouting, finger pointing and finger snapping with the constituent, though the constituent never responded in kind. The substance of the statements Forhan yelled at the constituent were also questionable as they were generally disparaging "very sordid, disrespectful, and unconscionable" (according to the constituent and onlookers). (<https://www.cleveland.com/news/2023/05/cleveland-area-state-lawmaker-reprimanded-after-aggressive-statehouse-interaction-with-constituent.html>) Ultimately, whether Forhan knew or not at the time, the statements and manner in which Forhan delivered them to the Female, African-American constituent had the effect of intimidating, subjugating and threatening the constituent while demeaning the constituent's lived experience. (*Documentation Attached*)

The constituent was so aggrieved that she engaged news media and House leadership, both Republican and Democratic, to document her experience (<https://www.cleveland.com/opinion/2023/06/this-brave-democrat-will-not-be-intimidated-but-rep-forhan-should-face-committee-removal-after-his-outburst-ladosha-wright.html>). After deliberation and counseling of Rep. Forhan, Ohio House Democratic Leadership decided to sanction Rep. Forhan for his inappropriate behavior by requiring him to complete implicit bias training, which he did. Forhan's demeanor during counseling was erratic. At times he would not accept responsibility for his conduct. At other times, he appeared to be regretful more so about the constituent filing a formal and public complaint, rather than his conduct. Ultimately, he was encouraged and guided in releasing a statement of apology in which he publicly appeared to accept responsibility for the altercation.

In late May and Early June, local elected officials and a labor union representative from Forhan's district contacted House Democratic Leadership to express significant concern regarding Forhan's behavior and aggressive, inappropriate interactions with members of the public and organizations within his community. Forhan's behavior was so unsettling and alarming at this point, that House Democratic Leadership contacted community members who had worked with him, to gain insights relative to having productive interactions. His state senator, county party chair, all generally expressed similar concerns—that Forhan would resort to screaming, vulgarity and threats if challenged or merely coached on any given issue. Ultimately, a series of mediation sessions with aggrieved community members was organized.

In June of 2023, Forhan made an unannounced visit to a state representative's House, one who had witnessed Forhan's berating of his constituent in May. Ostensibly, the visit was intended by Forhan to foster some kind of goodwill or engage in dialogue Forhan believed would assist him in assailing his constituent's claims. (At this point, Forhan's constituent had become increasingly vocal about her experience and maltreatment, engaging prominent figures in Forhan's community to aid her in seeking recompense. The constituent also continued to engage House Democratic and Republican Leadership on the matter.)

Forhan's unannounced arrival at the state representative's house was viewed as worrisome and hostile by the state representative. Having received no response to repeated phone calls to the representative previously, Forhan simply arrived at her house and knocked on her door as if to compel a conversation or force an interaction.

The state representative communicated their surprise and discomfort with Forhan's unannounced visit, then contacted House Democratic Leadership to voice her concerns. Forhan was combative in the aforementioned interactions. Also, at this time, Forhan began characterizing the May interaction with his constituent as "a set-up," essentially shifting the responsibility for his behavior to unknown, perceived forces in his community. After deliberation, and in consideration of the totality of Forhan's behavior to date—which also involved apoplectic, incidental interactions with House staff, representatives, and community members-- House Democratic Leadership counseled Forhan on appropriate social interactions and professionalism as an elected official and stripped him of his leadership position on Government Oversight committee as a consequence for his behavior to date.

Around this time, it was generally known by staff and members that Forhan would resort to screaming, vulgarity and threats if he sensed he was not getting his way. Forhan had developed a reputation for calling staff at all hours of the night and day with requests that only made sense to him. When questioned or offered assistance for a course correction, Forhan would become irate and threaten retaliation by implying staff or leadership would be politically hurt by Forhan's subsequent actions. (*Documentation Attached*)

Forhan's pattern of enraged, erratic and abusive behavior toward members and staff continued through the summer months, culminating in a series of incidents during which he threatened to take his own life or challenged others to kill him. One such incident happened on September 20 during a mediation session between Forhan and Equality Ohio. The session was initiated and led by members of House Democratic Leadership after Forhan had been inappropriate and disrespectful to a representative from the organization. During the mediation session, Forhan became distraught and animated, at one point using his hand to make a gun gesture to his head while he challenged a member to "Just shoot me. Just shoot me in the head. Kill me, kill me..." This was done in front of junior staff.

Immediately following the unsuccessful mediation attempt, House Democratic Leadership sought Employee Assistance Program (EAP) contact information and Forhan's emergency contact listing because of the violent nature of his discourse. House Democratic Leadership communicated Forhan's violent dialogue to select senior staff of the organization. Staff confirmed Forhan had threatened suicide around the same time as the meeting on an unrelated issue when it became apparent staff disagreed with his approach.

On Oct. 7, Democratic and Republican leaders and staff in the House worked closely with Ohio Jewish Communities while responding to the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel. The same members and staff had

taken an educational mission trip together to Israel six weeks prior. Ultimately, statements of support for Israel and condemnation of the attacks were issued by both caucuses that day.

Immediately upon release of the joint statements, Forhan began calling staff to demand an answer as to why he wasn't included in the statement. He became irate and paranoid that there was malintent behind the issuing of statements due to the religious and ethnic composite of his district. It was explained to Forhan that he should, indeed, consider putting out a statement also, and that there would be no reason not to amplify previous supportive statements, unless he didn't agree with their substance.

Following the escalation of the Israeli response to the Hamas attacks, Forhan became preoccupied, during the week of Oct. 9, with using his office to call Israel's response a "war crime" and to make a personal appeal to the Israeli Prime Minister to stop the military response. Forhan planned to make a House floor speech (<https://ohiohouse.gov/members/elliott-forhan/video/israel-psa-74892>) condemning Israel's response as a war crime under the Geneva Conventions. Throughout the week, Forhan became hostile to input from members and staff on his approach, but oddly Forhan still engaged staff when he was unable to give his planned speech. Forhan's engagement at this time was exceedingly aggressive, demanding answers from staff and quizzing staff on lesser-known facts of the Holocaust and Geneva Conventions. During this time, Forhan also again asked staff "where the highest bridge in Franklin County was" so that he might "jump off and kill himself" if he felt he was unable to express himself. Staff told Forhan he should not make suicidal threats internally or externally to partners and that he would be supported in getting help to navigate these feelings.

This same week, the week of Oct. 9, Forhan called a representative for the Ohio Jewish Communities 19 times in a row. When the representative called Forhan back, Forhan began yelling, demanding the representative to say "Palestinians Are Not People," "I need to hear you fucking say it—Palestinians are not People," a demand Forhan repeated multiple times. The interaction was so alarming the representative for OJC immediately notified House Democratic Leadership.

After confirmed suicidal threats and inappropriate conduct to a leading figure in Ohio's Jewish community, the House Democratic Leader and Assistant Leader met with Forhan to discuss his increasingly erratic, hostile and inappropriate behavior. During the meeting, Forhan made additional threats to kill himself, at which point he was provided with EAP resources. To summarize the meeting, Forhan was erratic, vacillating between despondence and rage while he largely remain focused on past issues where he perceived wrongdoing toward him by members, staff or unknown third-party actors. The meeting concluded with no recognizance on Forhan's part of the danger of his behavior and statements nor did Forhan commit to working on his treatment of others. Forhan committed to the Leader and Assistant Leader that he was under the care of licensed counselor.

This week (Oct. 9) also brought a marked shift in how Forhan engaged on the issue. He said he would be wearing his "I Love Israel" shirt everywhere and knocking on doors in Beechwood, a heavily Jewish community in his district, assumedly to guard against the perception he was anti-Israel. Essentially, he identified implicitly a plan to pander to known pro-Israel opinions in his district to lessen the electoral impact his previous statements and interactions had made in addition to future social media activity he planned. He believed at the time that Jewish organizations in his community would mount a campaign to replace him as state representative.

The following week of Oct. 16, Forhan began to turn his attention to other legislative ideas. For one initiative, it was suggested that he talk to the community his bill proposal would impact most before introducing it—workers. He reluctantly agreed and a representative from a labor union made contact with Forhan about his bill concept.

Forhan became apoplectic with the labor representative and threatened to kill himself. The organization's representative made contact with House Democratic Leadership to relay concerns regarding interaction.

The week of Oct. 16, Forhan also acted inappropriately with local leaders in the Jewish community, prompting Forhan's colleague to seek mediation or at minimum document Forhan's erratic and inappropriate behavior. (*Documentation Attached*)

House Democratic Leadership then debated calling one of Forhan's parents—his emergency contact—but decided against it, as it could have further isolated Forhan or pushed him into a spiral.

On Nov. 14, House staff of Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths expressed concern to the House Democratic Personnel Officer and Legal Counsel about Forhan's staging of an Israeli flag next to a Muslim member's office who had a young Muslim intern and constituents regularly visiting. It was known Forhan had an embargo on constituent visits and meetings "until after the Primary" election. The staff were perplexed by Forhan's intent behind displaying the Israeli flag in a thoroughfare, and wondered if it was meant to incite some type of conflict with passers-by, some of whom are Muslim pages, staff and interns in their late teens and early 20's. Forhan was asked by the House Democratic Chief of Staff if Forhan would consider placing the flag in his office, where his American flag was displayed, as young staff had questions about its intent and the emotion it evoked. Forhan quickly agreed, then backtracked saying the staff who expressed concerns should come talk to him about his nuanced views. The House Democratic Chief of Staff communicated that it would be inappropriate for young staff to be forced into a position with a state representative where there is a clear and marked power differential from the employees' standpoint. After Forhan apparently placed the flag in his office, he quickly made a social media post explicitly targeting the chief of staff and indicated falsely he was forced to remove the flag. (*The incident involving staff and Rep. Forhan on Nov. 14 is documented in the attached supplements.*)

On Nov. 15, Forhan confronted Rep. Munira Abdullahi alone in a committee room, after she noted his recent social media post targets a staff member and is potentially dangerous to that staff member. Forhan began screaming and noted he didn't "give a fuck" about the staffer and "fuck" the staffer. Forhan continued yelling that Palestinian children are dying and the staffer should publicly call for a cease fire. Forhan continued to yell at the representative, who is Muslim, about the number of children being killed by Israel, implying he was the only one doing anything about it. At this point, another staffer had entered and exited the room and was so alarmed by Forhan's behavior that the staffer reported it to senior staff and member leadership.

After learning of the altercation, House Democratic Leaders sought to engage Forhan immediately on his behavior toward the female, African American state representative, who had been so visibly shaken by Forhan's aggression, that she had to leave the area.

At this point, awareness of Forhan's aggression was being shared out of safety concerns for staff and members. The House Sergeant At Arms were called and dispatched to stand outside of the Statehouse room where Forhan was, as it seemed realistic Forhan could become physically violent given his previous statements and increasing escalation of events.

State Representatives Jessica Miranda, Terrence Upchurch and Dontavius Jarrells asked Forhan to speak to them in private in another room, and Forhan agreed. The Representatives began to explain that Forhan's behavior moments ago was reflective of a larger issue— that his outbursts and lack of consideration for others resulted in feelings of hostility and harassment by those whom have interacted with him.

The representatives asked Forhan what he felt they could do to improve the situation or change future interactions.

Forhan became even more belligerent, yelling at Rep. Upchurch to "punch me in the face," "just do it," "punch me right in the fucking face." The representatives tried to use Forhan's statements as another example of how not to interact with people, but Forhan continued to yell over the members, calling one a "fucking liar" and saying "liar is written all over your face".

At this point, Representative Jarrells ended the meeting and told Forhan that this would be the last time he was able to speak to members or staff in that way. Rep. Jarrells asked Forhan to not come to caucus and to take time to reflect on the events that just transpired.

Ultimately, hostility, profanity, and dangerous, violent remarks have unfortunately been the hallmark of Rep. Forhan's tenure in the Ohio House of Representatives. Forhan finds combative outbursts where there should be collaborative conversation. He finds political pandering and manipulation in place of substantive policy work. He threatens self-harm and violence when he should be leading to protect others against it.

November 16th

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a 21 year old student at The Ohio State University. I am currently interning at the [REDACTED] to foster a better understanding of the legislative processes in Ohio and what occurs behind the scenes, including the behaviors and interactions in the world created between our elected representatives, staffers, and constituents. During my time at the Ohio State House I have met wonderful people that have generously and continuously facilitated my educational and social experience. I was able to learn about true professionalism and humanity through positive examples and it is because of them that my overall experience has been smooth, comfortable, and pleasant.

However, I think it is extremely important to shed light on inappropriate or offensive behaviors that I have seen in the office and who in particular I have seen those from. I met Representative Elliot Forhan in September, my work space is in front of my representatives office and therefore directly across from Representative Forhan. Our general interactions are fine, but Representative Forhan has shown that either he is ignorant of office standards and appropriate office mannerisms or he simply does not care to practice them. Beginning in late September, mainly throughout October, he has regularly done inappropriate and offensive things including; taking personal phone calls on speaker with his office door open (these calls consist of intimate and almost sexual calls with what I presume to be his partner and calls with the use of aggressive language and swear words), belching/snorting/hacking and other disgusting sounds with his door open, and making dismissive or invalidating remarks towards the war on Gaza, specifically the first attack on al-Ahli hospital that was sheltering and treating civilian victims.

I understand that Representative Forhan is an educated man with much passion for his work, and I understand that we are humans who will surely make mistakes regardless of our occupational positions. Although these facts may explain his foul language and his unnecessary bodily noises, that is still not an excuse for behaviors that make your coworkers feel uncomfortable or unsafe. I hope my statement is heard and provides more insight on the tendencies held by Representative Elliot Forhan.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, November 17, 2023 8:56 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Incident - 11-16-23

On November 16th, 2023, at around 4:30 pm, I had a conversation with [REDACTED] an 18-year-old Muslim Legislative Page. During our chat, I checked in on her work progress and asked about her colleagues. As our talk drew to a close, I inquired about the posters displayed on Rep Forhan's door. [REDACTED] confirmed that she had seen them while passing by, not because someone had told her about them. However, the topic appeared to upset her, and she became emotional and started to cry. I offered her a tissue and focused on comforting her.

I expressed my regret to [REDACTED] for not being aware of her feelings and assured her that we take this matter seriously. As a Caucus, we will take the necessary steps to ensure everyone has a safe and inclusive work environment.

[REDACTED]
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High St., 10th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
[REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, November 14, 2023 5:58 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Statement - November 14, 2023

November 14, 2023

On November 14th, 2023, three of my colleagues [REDACTED] visited my office at approximately 9:00 am to express their concerns about the display of the Israeli flag by Rep. Forhan in our shared workspace. They explained that given the current political climate, such a display could potentially make people feel uncomfortable. As this was the first time I had been made aware of this issue, I decided to look into it further. I took a photo of the flag and informed [REDACTED] our Chief of Staff, about the concerns raised by the staff.

To the best of my knowledge, [REDACTED] took action by requesting that Rep. Forhan move the flag inside his office to avoid any potential impact on the work environment. However, after approximately thirty minutes, a TikTok post surfaced, making allegations against Jordan and our leadership. The post claimed that they had forced Rep. Forhan to remove the flag.

It is important to note that this issue was raised because our staff has the right to work in a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment. Therefore, our policy reflects that his actions were not conducive to providing a discrimination-free and harassment-free work environment. Rep. Forhan's actions disregarded the staff's right to a hostile-free work environment.

In my opinion, the following policies may have been violated:

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN EMPLOYMENT

The House is committed to fostering a workplace free from discrimination and harassment based on legally protected characteristics. Representatives, employees, volunteers, and invitees are expected to behave in a manner befitting this august institution.

NO DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT OR RETALIATION

Statement The Ohio House prohibits discrimination, harassment and retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin or ancestry, disability, age (40 years or older), genetic information, veteran or military status, or any other characteristics protected by law ("Protected Characteristics"). This Policy reflects the standards of conduct expected by the Ohio House which may be more stringent than the minimum standards imposed by law. Therefore, a violation of this policy should not be assumed to be a violation of law. Every Representative, employee, and volunteer of the House is expected to adhere to this Policy.

This Policy also extends to any interaction, including online/electronic, that creates a hostile environment or disrupts the workplace.

Harassment Based on Other Protected Characteristics

This Policy also prohibits harassment based on the other Protected Characteristics.

Harassing conduct includes epithets, slurs or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating jokes; and written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group that is placed on walls or elsewhere on the employer's premises or circulated in the workplace, on company time or using company equipment by e-mail, phone (including voice messages), text messages, social networking sites or other means.

November 14, 2023

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
77 S. High St, [REDACTED]
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Continued erratic behavior of Rep. Elliot Forhan towards [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] staff

Dear [REDACTED]

Over the course of the last several months, myself and [REDACTED] have been facing more and more encounters with Representative Elliot Forhan where he has exemplified a pattern of erratic, aggressive and unbecoming behavior. At times, that behavior has included, but not limited to, outbursts of anger, repeated phone calls or text messages with unreasonable requests, and moments of paranoia where he states he is being targeted directly by the [REDACTED] or indirectly by caucus leadership, or even by outside actors.

Representative Forhan has displayed this behavior on several occasions the past several months, including:

- drafting of the Trust Women's Act
- House Commerce and Labor Committee/Ladosha Wright confrontation
- House Democratic Caucus Leadership Statement supporting Israel
- his response to House Resolution 292
- the introduction of the Reproductive Care Act

I feel for the wellbeing of myself, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] House staff members this unprofessional behavior must be officially recognized and prudently addressed. Please let me know how I may be of further assistance to you in this matter.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Ohio House of Representative [REDACTED]

11/14/2023

[REDACTED] came to my office this morning to express concern about the flag Rep. Forhan put out in the hallway. They told me they had been approached by [REDACTED] who told them she was concerned for constituents visiting Rep. Mohamed and that this display could be interpreted by the constituents as a formal statement by the caucus. Because this involved employees, I told them we should go see [REDACTED]. The employees told [REDACTED] that staff was uncomfortable, and [REDACTED] left us in her office while she went to get a photo of the display. She came back in and said she sent the photo to Jordan. I went back to my office and called [REDACTED] office, he didn't pick up and then I texted him to call me. Shortly thereafter (perhaps 15 minutes) [REDACTED] came to me and said he asked Rep. Forhan to put the flag in his office.

I have been in and out of the 10th floor three times today. Each time I saw people who were dressed in traditional Muslim clothing, such as burkas and hijabs.

November 14, 2023

At approximately 8:45am today, [REDACTED] came to my office to ask if I had been past Rep Forhan's office yet today. She then described a large, free-standing Israeli flag that had been placed next to his intern desk.

I was aware that [REDACTED] had already fielded a number of phone calls and emails from Rep Mohamed's constituents expressing concerns and opinions about statements he had made in relation to the war and October Hamas strike. Given the number of constituents that Rep Mohamed has visiting his office each week, [REDACTED] both thought that the flag's presence could be uncomfortable on such broad display. [REDACTED] had also informed me that two Muslim student interns in her office had previously expressed to [REDACTED] their discomfort with Rep Forhan's very outward presentation of support for the State of Israel.

I approached [REDACTED] this morning shortly after speaking with Julia to raise these concerns. [REDACTED] let me know that she would call [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, November 14, 2023 7:26 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Brief Summary of Interactions with Representative Forhan

On multiple occasions, Representative Forhan has raised his voice with me in an unprofessional, inappropriate and abrasive manner, without provocation, during scheduled phone calls to discuss legislative matters. During these calls, it is my view that Representative Forhan often attempted to belittle me by shouting and interrupting. Interactions of this nature have become routine with Representative Forhan.

From: Weinstein, Casey <Casey.Weinstein@ohiohouse.gov>

Sent: Friday, October 27, 2023 4:19:21 PM

To: Russo, Allison <Allison.Russo@ohiohouse.gov>

Cc: Jarrells, Dontavius <Dontavius.Jarrells@ohiohouse.gov>; Miranda, Jessica <Jessica.Miranda@ohiohouse.gov>; Galonski, Tavia <Tavia.Galonski@ohiohouse.gov>

Subject: Concerns from the Jewish Community

Leadership team,

I want to convey my concern about interactions that Rep. Forhan has had with prominent members of the Jewish community. In the wake of the Hamas attacks in Israel, Rep. Forhan has posted and retweeted inflammatory and unverified or outright untrue information to seemingly justify the attacks.

Members of the community, including JDCA lead [REDACTED] and members of the ADL, have relayed their concerns. In the case of [REDACTED], Forhan responded with the attached, asking [REDACTED] to 'fund my primary opponent', which he repeated multiple times.

While there are absolutely legitimate conversations to be had about this complex situation, and I know we want to create dialogue across the communities impacted by these global events, as a member of the Jewish community I am deeply concerned that Rep. Forhan is worsening the divide. His appeals to Israel where he seems to connect the Holocaust to his alleged Israeli violations of the Geneva Convention are deeply out of line, damaging and hurtful.

These interactions fit a pattern I'm aware of from many people - and that has been reported publicly - of Elliott 'going off' on constituents bringing legitimate concerns to him.

I hope this can be addressed with him and that he can temper his inflammatory rhetoric, especially as he represents the largest Jewish community in Ohio.

Respectfully,
Rep. Casey Weinstein

7:48



Done



These words are supercharged
and the timing of your repost is
inappropriate to many people in
the Jewish community

How did they get there

You wanna talk about we got here
at a moment like this?

As if it's some justification for
these attacks?

And you think people in the Jewish
community won't notice?

How did they get there?

I can see you're ready to burn
some bridges this morning.

Fund my primary opponent.

Fund my primary opponent.



September 20, 2023

Interaction between Rep. Forhan and [REDACTED], [REDACTED] legislative aide.

Representative [REDACTED] has asked me to write this as a supplement to the previously submitted September 20th memo.

Representative [REDACTED] asked me to sit in a meeting between [REDACTED], Rep. Galonski, Rep. Forhan, and [REDACTED] Equality Ohio. I was sitting with [REDACTED] in Rep. [REDACTED] office before the meeting started. Rep. Forhan came to the meeting earlier and there was an interaction between us, documented below, where I felt disrespected.

I do not have any expectation of representatives to know of my experience or education, but I do expect to be treated as an adult and as a professional. For context, I have my bachelor's degree in Political Science with a concentration in American Government and Political Theory. I have my master's degree in Political Science with a concentration in American Government and Public Policy. I also earned my Juris Doctor from Capital University Law School.

Events Before the Meeting

Representative Forhan came up to the 14th floor before the planned meeting time. He introduced himself to Maria Bruno, and then turned and introduced himself to me, asking if I was also with Equality Ohio. I explained that I am Representative [REDACTED] legislative aide. He then explained that he came up early to speak with Rep. [REDACTED] about a bill he was working on, "The Trust Women Act". He asked if we could talk about it, as Rep. [REDACTED] was not there yet; I said that I would be happy to chat with him about it.

He started quizzing me on this piece of legislation, asking if I knew what it did. I had recently read the co-sponsor request and I said something to the effect of "I believe it protects the interactions between doctors and their patients, providing for more protects for women seeking reproductive health care." Rep. Forhan started laughing at me and said that Rep. Somani wanted the co-sponsor request written that way, so it wasn't explicitly clear what the bill was about. He then started explaining that this bill would work off of Issue 1 on the November ballot and grant greater protections for reproductive care.

He then started quizzing me on Issue 1, asking if I knew what it did. I said that it would codify *Roe v. Wade*, and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. I added the second case because it was less well known, and I hoped that Rep. Forhan would stop quizzing me and stop assuming I didn't know what Issue 1 was about. When I mentioned *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, he looked shocked and said, "very good" and continue to explain the reproductive care amendment and case law surrounding it. It was a condescending interaction and felt as though he was trying to take on a teaching role that I did not ask of him. I felt that he was talking down to me.

[REDACTED], a stakeholder and someone outside of the caucus, witnessed this interaction. She was compelled to text Rep. [REDACTED] about it. [REDACTED] said that he was "mansplaining" reproductive rights to me.

September 20, 2023 – 1:00 pm

Representative [REDACTED] Riffe Center Office

Meeting Attendees: Representative Jessica E. Miranda, Representative Tavia Galonski, Representative Elliot Forhan, [REDACTED] (Equality Ohio), [REDACTED] (LA to Rep. [REDACTED])

Reason for Meeting: Representative Forhan acted unprofessionally towards [REDACTED] Rep. Forhan demanded Equality Ohio involvement in a protest the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. When [REDACTED] told Rep. Forhan that Equality Ohio will not be planning a protest of that kind, Rep. Forhan said unprofessional things, such as “I guess you don’t care about gay people, like my moms” to [REDACTED]. The meeting was meant as a mediation between [REDACTED] and Rep. Forhan.

Events Transpired in the Meeting:

- Rep. Forhan entered the office and introduced himself to [REDACTED] - as their interactions have only been over social media, email, and text message.
- Rep. Miranda explained why everyone was at the meeting and that she felt, as Democratic Whip, it was important to have this meeting. She explained that Equality Ohio is a close ally to Ohio House Democrats and that alienating these allies is harmful to the caucus and the party. It is not how a state representative should act. She wanted to provide a space for a mediation between the two parties.
- Rep. Miranda asked [REDACTED] to start.
 - o [REDACTED] explained Equality Ohio’s philosophy on getting involved in protests and events across the state.
 - o She explained why she thought Rep. Forhan’s idea for a protest the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland was not well thought out.
 - o She explained that Rep. Forhan’s demanding tone, and comments, like “I guess you don’t care about gay people, like my moms” were unprofessional and difficult to deal with/understand. [REDACTED] explained that she is a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself and has devoted her career to Equality Ohio.
 - o Rep. Forhan listened with his eyes closed and hands in a prayer position against his mouth.
- Rep. Forhan took issue with [REDACTED] thinking he was ‘demanding’ anything from Equality Ohio and explained his vision for the protest and why he felt it needed to be done, and what results it would yield.
 - o [REDACTED] went through their conversation message by message explaining why she considered it demanding and unprofessional.
 - o Rep. Miranda and Rep. Galonski tried to contextualize for Rep. Forhan what affect a protest like what he envisioned would actually have.

During the Meeting

During the actual meeting, Rep. Forhan went through periods of high animation. I was sitting next to him and felt extremely uncomfortable. There were times when he was yelling at Rep. [REDACTED] and leaning over me to get closer to her. He invaded my personal space.

After the Meeting

Rep. [REDACTED] and Rep. Galonski both apologized to me for his behavior during the meeting and told me it was unprofessional, and not how a member of this caucus should act.

Rep. [REDACTED] asked me to write a memo about the meeting and has recently asked me to supplement that memo with information about my interaction with Rep. Forhan before the meeting. If you have any questions about the events, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Ladosha Wright. I am writing this letter of complaint regarding my very volatile, condescending, aggressive and fiery tirade from Rep Elliot Forhan.

On Tuesday, May 23rd, during a hearing on HB 58 I, Ladosha Wright, a 23-year Ohio licensed cosmetologist and salon owner gave opposition testimony opposed to HB 58. My testimony resulted in a positive exchange of questions and answers from various members of the Labor and Commerce Committee. Afterwards, State Rep. Juanita Brent introduced me to State Rep. Susan Manchester who had a question or two about braids. After a friendly exchange, State Rep Juanita Brent introduced me to State Rep Elliot Forhan as a supporter of HB 58. Rep Elliott was not present during the hearing. The introduction was simply for him to know who I was, thank him for his time and to share my one thought on the importance of education about Afro hair for HB 58.

After I greeted Rep Forhan pleasantly with a handshake, he entered the dialogue with his head hung low, eyes closed, a series of head nods, and very loud murmurs of, "umm hmm." As I attempted to end my sentence about education, Rep. Forhan began to yell, "You see, I don't want to hear anything about education. I am for free enterprise. And I hate the government for this. And if I could, I would snap my finger." Before I knew it, he snapped his fingers in my face and proceeded to finish his sentence yelling, "I would make them go away." To which I replied, as my eyes fluttered, "But you can't." He yelled even louder and began pointing his finger in my face, State Rep. Juanita Brent, my brother Shan Smith, my colleague Herbert Pittmon, Peter Stevens, and Kelly Jo McCarthy, and one other gentleman who was sitting in his chair rose as they all stood in disbelief. Rep Forhan continued, "But if I could, I would." Raising his voice even higher, banging on the table as his face was turning red. He began shaking his head no and continued to snap his fingers in my face, "I said, if I could I would snap my fingers and make them go away." I politely responded as he leaned into me, "But you can't. I respect free enterprise Sir. I am only speaking to the Afro hair education that African Americans never received in cosmetology." He replied, "I don't care about education. Did you hear what I said? I would snap my finger and make them all go away." Then I stated, "But you can't. You're already reaping the benefits from your education and license. You are an Ohio Representative." He pointed his finger in my face again and snapped his fingers so close, I felt he wanted to slap me. He then continued to yell as he asked, "Do you know how many of my friends want to practice law but can't because the cost of education and to pay to take the test to become a licensed attorney is so high? Do you know how stupid that test is? I only took it because I had to. Oh, if I could." I replied, "No. And it doesn't matter because in this country you cannot practice law without education or a license." While banging on the table very hard, he continued, "And that is stupid. It doesn't make any sense. Do you know how much I hate the cost education and these stupid licenses?" I replied, "No I do not sir. But with all due respect, this bill is not about you, your friends, law school, and the price to pay to take a test to get a license to become a lawyer."

He yelled, again, "If I could snap my fingers, I would make them all go away."

By this point I could hear Peter Stevens saying, "Stop it. What are you saying? That's enough. Please stop." He snapped his fingers in my face, "If I could." Then I heard Rep Brent ask him why he was banging on the table and that he needed to calm down. Another witness, Kelly Jo McCarthy, asked him to stop. As he replied, "If I could." I verbally suggested him to demonstrate his disdain for the government's approach to education and connecting it with licensures and quit. He replied, "If I could." Pointing his finger in the air, he proceeded to say, "I have another meeting to go to." I shook his hand, thanked him for his time, and stood there. Rep. Brent immediately apologized for his behavior and stated she had no idea of where his behavior came from. She thanked me again and we left the room.

Rep Brent exited a door in one direction. Shan, Herbert, Kelly, Peter, and I exited another door in the opposite direction. As the door closed behind us, I immediately burst into tears. I asked them all why? What had I done? Peter replied, "Nothing." I cried and asked why do Black people have to do this? Why do we have to cow down to White people? "He was mean. He was angry. He was so condescending, I felt sick. He was rude." And I was afraid. I could not show it. I shook his hand for fear of being accused of being the "angry" Black woman or even not being allowed to return to speak. I am utterly devastated.

I took the liberty to learn more about State Rep Elliot Forhan. I learned he graduated from Yale, he fought for the rights of the LGBTQ community because his parents, two moms, careers as educators would have been threatened if they came out as a couple. The article stated Forhan felt no person should have to live their life in secrecy to work. I find his statements about education and the government the opposite of his upbringing and education.

My letter of complaint reflects the truth about White power in America. As much as my heart felt pain from his repeated yelling, my self-worth dwindled from the snapping of his fingers, and my self-value lowered from him pointing his fingers in my face in relation to what he could make go away if he could, was about something else. I can't prove what I felt. But my stomach did. The description of what I experienced today in the capital should never be an experience for any Ohio constituent. We should be able to agree to disagree without the actions and words spewed by Rep Forhan. I should not feel pains in my stomach, racing of my heart, and tears stinging my eyes as I type this complaint. That experience has so many undertones and overtures of everything anti-human, it's pathetic. He was disrespectful without civility or any regard to me as his fellow human being.

Considering Rep Elliot Forhan overtly and very angrily stated his disdain for education and the government, he should not be in that position. While I am of the mindset, one can hate a job and its requirements and still work there, to me he is not ready to serve and represent his district. He does not know how to carry himself with his Yale law education, Ohio law license, listen to opposing views in a dignified manner to reach his political goals and get his bills passed.

An apology or acknowledgement of his unprofessional and uncouth behavior would be nice. But do understand, it will not erase the pain and horrible stain he has left in my mind, stomach, and heart. His actions and words should be addressed with a corrective action plan. Being staunch on your position is one thing, resulting to intimidation is another.

For all he did for his parents and the LGBTQ community to love and live freely, I find his comments hypocritical. I feel this incident will lie hidden in secrecy as I forever feel the pain and strain of his words, that whisp of air from his finger snaps of arrogance across my face and pounding on the table coming for his condescending tirade. I ask that you provide him with more training, anger management, and hold him to a higher standard given his very important and esteemed title as an Ohio State Representative.

Respectfully submitted,

Ladosha Wright,

Licensed cosmetologist, Salon Owner, and
37 year registered Democrat voter